

Interview on 18 July 2017 John Allonby by Rebecca Oakes and Janet Dobson

RO - Thank you so much for having us, we are really pleased to be able to come. This is part of the Rusland Horizons Oral History Project and its looking at the landscape of the Rusland Horizons and I know you go back a long way in the valley and you must have seen quite some changes over the years.

JA - Yes, me dads family, the Allonbys, were woodmen going back many, many generations into the early/late 18th century as far as I have gone back, but there would have been others that go further back, but that is as far as I have gone back at the present time. They worked in many woods all over, through the Rusland valley, up to Muncaster, they came as far as Muncaster. Me grandfather was born up in Seathwaite near Broughton and lived there for a long time and most of me great uncles were born at this place in, up in Seathwaite, near Broughton anyway, just up from Broughton there.

RO - Was it a farm?

JA - No, no, they would just be living in accommodation of some form or another, I am not sure what, they were not farmers at that time. And as I say they were in the wood business all along and I presume at that time cos I do know, that in the late 18th/19th century they were doing charcoal burning, right throughout, they were doing charcoal burning. But charcoal burning is not a round the year job, it can only be done at certain times of the year. So at other times of the year they would be doing the other bits of the wood business, bobbin wood and things of that nature.

RO - so for your dad was it always just assumed that he would follow the family trade?

JA - No, by 1920, the charcoal business had basically finished when Backbarrow Ironworks went from charcoal to coke, there was still a little bit charcoal being made up to about 1935 for the gunpowder works in the area. I think mainly that was done by the Elwoods.

RO - I was going to ask you about them.

JA - Well we are related to them.

RO - Oxen Park?

JA - Yeah.

RO - What's the relationship then?

JA - The relationship, I haven't sussed it out altogether but one of my great aunts married an Elwood.

RO - right.

JA - Which one, I never followed it through altogether. I think we were related to virtually everybody up in that area anyway, from that point of view. So, by, say, the 1920's the charcoal business had collapsed. They were still in the wood business but they moved into farming. Me grandfather, me dad was born at Spark Bridge, where I was, in one of the Row up at the top, whereas I was born in the Square in Spark Bridge. They did farm near Penny Bridge, I have forgotten the name of the place now. Then they were farming through the 30's and 40's at Bandrake Head.

RO - Oh yeah.

JA - And when me, but they must have, I am not sure what happened, whether they sold the farm on, I don't know, but they then moved into a cottage at Bandrake Head. And me grand mother and grand father, who I never knew lived in the cottage at

RO - your dad's parents, yeah

JA - yeah, at Bandrake Head. Me dad went to school initially at Penny Bridge but he spent most of his school time at Colton School and it was while he was at Colton School they were on the farm at the time at Bandrake Head and he lost the sight of an eye through an accident with a tin of brick lime and water.

RO - Ooh, burn.

JA - He lost, well for 12 months he was blind in both eyes.

RO - At what age, sorry.

JA - About 11.

RO - Oh no.

JA - And then, he did get the sight back in one eye, but he lost the sight in the other. And as I say he went to school at Colton and he left there at 14 and he became a farm hand and he worked on quite a number of farms. There was Becksides at Colton, he worked there for a bit, he worked for the, that was Philipson and there was two brothers, Robert and Frank, and Frank had a farm near Birker Fell, up at Ulverston there, and he worked there for a while. He worked on me grandad's farm, at Penny Bridge, Sodhouse farm, which is where he met me mother. And he worked for another farm near there, would it be Low Scaffold Farm I think? And then that would be up until

his 20's, and early 30's and then he left farming and started his own wood business in his early 30's. And continued, it would be mainly bobbin wood and, there was obviously no charcoal, bobbin wood, bark, stakes and all sorts of things. And then he continued doing that, during the war, he did get called up for the Navy in, I think it was late 43, he always said it was a mistake.

RO - what do you mean?

JA - Well, he was in a reserved occupation, the wood, but anyway, he was called up and invalided out within a few months, in December.

RO - His sight issues?

JA - No, it wasn't his sight, no he got pneumonia. He was called up in the Navy and got pneumonia. He was in Barrow Gurney hospital at Bristol over the Christmas period and he was invalided out. It was only a few months and then he was in the Home Guard after that as well. So he continued on with the wood business after that. Me mum, he met me mum, obviously, he married me mum, I think it would be 45, they got married in late 45. And initially, they lived at Penny Bridge in one of me grandads houses, Park Terrace, and then me grandad bought the house at Spark Bridge and they lived there right through until he died. Me memories of him at that time was he employed quite a number of woodcutters and he was cutting in various places. One wood I sort of remember but I must have been very, very young. It was an important wood to him - it was the Great Wood at Dale Park and he had a number of people cutting for him, carting and in the 40's stuff went by train from Haverthwaite station but in the late 40's after the war he got an ex army lorry and delivered his own stuff.

RO - I was going to say he must have been one of the biggest businesses...

JA - Not really, he only employed maybe 5,6 maybe up to 10 I think at one time but no more than that and then in the 50's things started to slow down so the number of people he employed dropped off and by the early 60's there was only him and his brother, Uncle Norman. They worked at the Great Wood up at Dale Park. And that was a big wood and I think he made quite a, you know, it was a good wood to work on, I think from that point of view.

RO - You implied it was special to him in some way, or it was a good earner?

JA - Yes, I think it was, yeah, and I do remember we must have been, taken us up there as kids at one time because there was a big flood and all the roads in the wood had been washed out and he was having to repair them. And he took us, and it must have been again in the back end of the year because we could hear the stags barking up on the top. By this time he had got his tractor. He had a cleat/crawler tractor for moving stuff and quite often when we visited, we went to woods, visited woods or he was cutting them again and he would leave things, maybe the trailer or whatever there and then it would fall apart and he would collect the hinds up and make a new one. And the crawler, the tractor was moved from one wood to the other by the lorry because he got this lorry and moved it from one wood to the other by that. The earliest woods, other than the Great Wood, there was a woodland that he worked at and we went up there by train one day because he was there, cutting wood in there and it would be a Sunday and we went up, Mam took us up, me and me brother got the train at Greenodd and went up the line to Woodland and got off and then walked to the wood it wasn't far from there. With a picnic, but unfortunately she forgot to take a knife with her, cos the picnic was a loaf of bread and there would be jams and various other things but it was unsliced bread and she forgot to take a knife with her so dad had to cut it with his billhook.

RO - (Laughter) Doorstops I bet?

JA - Weren't too bad cos he said his billhook was very sharp. In the Great Wood, one of the tales he told at the Dale Park Wood was a lot of adders running up there and he said to the fellers 'come early enough in the morning you would be able to kill/get them,' you know they used to kill them, take them out. And, anyway next morning he went to work and the fellers had been there before him and in a wood they used to leave the tools, axes, billhooks, they would just shove them under the brash

RO - Yeah.

JA - left them there and leave them overnight and they were always left lying there and nobody would ever find them as they didn't know which brash they were in. So he knew where it was and he'd just stick his hand in to get his billhook and he jumped out back and somebody had killed one of these adders and wrapped it round his billhook handle

RO/JA - laughter.

RO - Oh dear, he didn't know who?

JA - it didn't matter anyway

RO - one of his colleagues? yeah.

JA - Yeah, aye, cos he had in woodland, he had me great uncle was working for him as well, Me Great Uncle Tyson, Tyson Allonby, he was working for him there as well. The woods that I started working with him, in 19.., around about the late 50's, early 60's there was one, not, I didn't work in, one up on, under the beeches, there was a wood up under Rusland Beeches up on there, I went to, I never did anything in there, but then he was on Rusland Heights which is a bit this side of the Rusland Beeches and yeah I did er, I worked quite a bit with him in there. The sort of things I was doing, I wasn't cutting trees down or anything like that but I would be tying up, counting out the rods and setters and tying them up with binder twine

RO - Right, that was your job

JA - and stacking them up so as he could move them out or if he was sawing firewood I would be on the end of the stick while he was at the end of the blunt end/sharp end cutting the logs so I would be, just holding the bit so I was keeping it steady

RO - and it was all hand tools still?

JA - Yeah, it was in that wood at Rusland Heights where he got his first chainsaw, and initially he found it very hard work, in fact he found it harder than the axe because he just wasn't used to the different type.

RO - Umm and they were heavy weren't they?

JA - yeah, they were fairly heavy, but it did eventually make a big difference to how much he could cut down in a day, rather than that, other than that, his felling axe was 7lb, 7lb felling axe that he used. And the tree stump, the trees would be only, the stump would be only about that far above the ground (gestures).

RO - just a couple of inches

JA - more or less and that was with the axe.

RO - right

JA - Umm,

RO - clean cuts,

JA - Oh yeah just smooth right across

RO - And the woodland owners did they insist on that? Or was that just good practice? That they did as a matter of course?

JA - What?

RO - Cut low and cut cleanly?

JA - Well because a lot of the wood was in the stump, so I think so yes, you would get out as much as you could

RO - You would get down as far as you could?

JA - Yeah, and when we were in that wood there was a lot of oak in there and you could go up and he would be peeling the oak and he would actually, what we call ouse them, he would actually take the bark up to about 6 foot.

RO - Right

JA - With the tree standing and you actually got the bark from around the bottom as well which is the thickest and heaviest part of the bark. So you would go up there, maybe 20 or 30 trees with no bark on, on the bottom 6 foot and then they would cut them down and take the rest of the bark off.

RO - So you could bark the bottom of the tree and still fell it and it would still, the bark would still be loose enough.

JA - Well yeah that would be, it was second sap time and the sap was coming down from the leaves

RO - OK so sort of more into August you mean?

JA - Yeah, well say July, August,

RO - July, August?

JA - Yeah, and so the sap, as soon as, your first, the sap is going up the tree and its feeding the buds

RO - Umm,

JA - Right

RO - April/May?

JA - and then when the the leaves come out fully then the leaves are starting to produce the sugars with the chlorophyl and what have you and so its coming back down to feed the roots of the tree.

RO - and you have got that looseness of the bark where you can get the bark off?

JA - Oh yeah, and thats where, you know, that he made himself a bark chopper as well so when he stacked it, stored it, all summer into the autumn, it was stacked up in the woods then he would fetch it down on the tractor and chop it into 2 inch squares.

RO - when you say he's made a bark chopper, what like a beet chopper or what?

JA - Well it was a an old farm straw chopper

RO - Ah yes,

JA - its a big wheel with 2 blades on

RO - yeah

JA - and he would feed it in and it just chops it up, well, took one of the blades off cos it would make the bark too small and one thing and another, took one of the blades off, put a drive belt on to it so it would draw off the tractor power take off and then put a trough on so you could have an automatic feed, you just put the bark in and it would just chop it.

RO - Fantastic, was he good mechanically like that?

JA - Yeah, he could fix anything if he had to, in a sense, from that point of view.

RO - and then the bark got bagged did it?

JA - yeah, it was in bags yeah, yeah, they were very heavy sacks they were, most of them huge sugar sacks and things of that nature that it went in

RO - and where did that get to?

JA - it went to Northallerton, there was a tannery at Northallerton and all his bark when up to this Northallerton place, yes.

RO - and what about the peeled poles then?

JA - that went for rustic and it mainly went down a lot of, most of it went down to Stoke-on-Trent

RO - right

JA - where there were people, companies down there turning it into garden furniture. Except, I don't think, its all finished is that now. Well you see, early memories, we used to go to, with me dad, when he was taking Crake wood, we used to, Crake wood, we went again to Stoke Hanley Stoke on Trent, I think it was somebody called Walkers, we went to and we would have a day off school

RO - right

JA - and the whole family, me mam, me and me brother and dad would get into the lorry, the ket of the lorry and we be setting off round about, we get up about 2 o'clock in the morning and set off at 3 and get to, I remember we always used to stop at er, in Preston, the toilets are still there actually,

RO - laughter

JA - we used to stop there about 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock in the morning for a rest and then get to Hanley about dinner time, off load get our dinner there and then come back and get back about 6/7 o'clock at night, so it was a full day.

RO - proper day

JA - yeah, and we did that quite a few times, it was only when we were at, obviously at Colton school and we also occasionally went to Liverpool as well where we took the rods and setters

RO - and they were just bundles of any sort of brash?

JA - any, anything at all. There was, we had 3 types, 50's were rods, 30's were setters and then there was another at 20's

RO - thats the number of pieces in the bundle

JA - yeah and each, the rods would be maybe just over 5'6' long cos they were only the small stuff like that, the setters were quite a bit bigger and they would be a bit longer and the 20's were quite long cos they were stuff round about like that (gestures). They all ended up about the same size

RO - right, yeah

JA - in effect, they all ended up in a bundle, about like that(gestures) at the thick end and obviously at the thin end it was (gestures)...

RO - and what were they being used for then?

JA - ships fenders,

RO - right

JA - now I suspect that they used to take them in there and then what they would do with them they would trim them, cut them up and bundle them up into large bundles and then they would cover them with rope.

RO - Ah I see, I never understood that, but yeah,

JA - so it would be covered in rope so as it wouldn't damage, scratch or damage anything and there was, well whenever you took a load you had about 6 or 700 bundles on a load going down and there wasn't only us there would be Hoggarths, there was 5 or 6 lots sending these down to Liverpool at different times.

RO - and so there wasn't that sort of trade in Barrow?

JA - No, no, no. It was Ship Shandlers at Liverpool that used to take them, no no there was nothing of that nature didn't do anything of that nature in Barrow it was mainly commercial shipping you see at Liverpool that they were for. Now whether they sent them onto other places I have no idea, maybe they did, maybe they didn't?

RO - that's a heck of a lot of material, I am just trying to get an idea in my mind what it used to look like.

JA - well it was quite high on the lorry there would be 3 that way (gestures) along the length and then you would have them that way (gestures) but they were piled high.

RO - stacking it was an art in itself?

JA - well, yeah, yeah, they were all stacked by hand of course. Cos I, must have been engaged at the time, so that would be after 68-69, because I actually I was on top of the lorry and I actually fell off the top and me ring caught and it buckled it, it didn't do any damage it just put a big mark in me ring but its er, I haven't got it now because it actually split, I think I got mercury on it at work, so

RO - so you didn't hurt yourself too badly

JA - No no, no, no, I was alright, that was at Thwaite Head, where that happened.

RO - Where you were that day when that happened?

JA - Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RO - Right OK

JA - Thwaite Head wood up there. I have memories of 63, he was working in Low Glass Knott, but it was a very hard winter, 62/63, me dad got pneumonia, so for quite a while he was actually in bed and getting the Doctors coming daily with Penecillin injections, what have you. And cos we burnt nothing but wood, in the fire, what happened is, me uncle used to walk down from Bandrake Head to Spark Bridge of a Saturday. Me dad had a car and he would pick the car up and me and then we would drive up to Low Glass Knott, fill the car with firewood and then come back home. I was 16, yeah 16 at the time and lads out of the village, that were a couple/3 years older than me, one of them had a car, it was a Renault Gourdini and it would be about January, we actually, there was a full car, there would be 4 or 5 of us in it and we went to Lakeside and actually drove onto the lake

RO - Really

JA - and drove up the lake, 2 or 3 miles up the lake on the ice

RO - Goodness

JA - and then came down and back off again. There was other cars on there was

RO - yeah

JA - motorbikes on and what have you as well.

RO - yeah

JA - on the lake, but when you think about it, it was a bit crazy really, but

RO - would that have been the only winter that you remember that was that cold?

JA - Oh yeah, it froze from, it started freezing in late November and it really never stopped freezing right through until the thaw in March. And there was huge ice flows at Greenodd, under the viaduct

RO - really

JA - and you pick frozen fish up on the shore if you wanted, yeah,

RO - Gosh.

JA - Oh there was er, yeah it was a really hard, very, very hard winter. We didn't have a lot of snow but there was some. And that same, very similar, not long after we had done the Lakeside run on the lake we went up, drove up to Tarn Hows. It be late on, 7/8 o'clock at night cos it was dark. And again, I think there was two cars went up and we parked the cars, they parked the cars so the lights shone down the, down on the slope, down to Tarn Hows. And we were sledging down the slope and across the ice. I say it was pitch black other than the car lights and it went on til about ten o'clock, so we had about 2 or 3 hours up there. And then one of the lads, 'Slim' - Norman Hodgen, went down and we could see him sliding across the ice but he didn't get up,

RO - right

JA - for a while, he just laid on the ice, so we went down, and he got up by this time, walking back and what had happened is the sledge had gone under the ice and he had gone on top of the

ice and he had hit his chin on the edge of the ice and cut his chin open. So we spent the next hour going down to the para, North Lonsdale Hospital to get him all stitched up

RO - get him all mended?

JA - so it would be about midnight before we got back.

RO - So what about your dad's involvement with charcoal making then?

JA - Well it started with Bill Norris and the film people with Bill, they want somebody, they'd been talking about, me dad had always been talking about doing a charcoal, wanting to do a charcoal burn. But never got any reason as to why he should.

RO - Would he have done it regularly when he was younger?

JA - No, when he was younger, yeah, he used to make, when he used to work with his, go into the wood with his dad and what have you, they would make small charcoal pits.

RO - right.

JA - Maybe about that height (gestures), small ones.

RO - Perhaps, two/three feet high?

JA - Yeah and me dad going up and down the place sort of thing and he would watch them doing it as well, yeah, so he knew what was going on. And also me Great Uncle Tyson was still alive and he was a charcoal burner at Greenodd in the early 1900's.

RO - Right

JA - So he was there if there was anything

RO - he had the skill?

JA - he knew what was what and what you did so and there was me dad's cousin, Billy, he was available, about as well, so there was a lot of information about and they got talking and Bill Norris lived in the village and they got talking and there was this company, a new film company, or a group of people wanting to make a film so they decided to make a film of it. And at the time dad was cutting in High Glass Knott and right as you go into High Glass Knott at the top there was a, just inside, there was the remains of a cabin, stonework and fireplace of a cabin and a few yards from that was the charcoal pit was still there so they were able to clear that off and make it ready for that and dad built a cabin, re-resurrected a cabin there, made a cabin out of it, its in those photos, you have seen photographs of it

RO - yeah, yeah, great.

JA - and so they did, they made a charcoal pit there and did a charcoal burn and it was filmed by these people. Not long after that

RO - was that the first one?

JA - yeah that was his first one.

RO - yeah

JA - that would be in the early 70's because it wasn't long after that, that there was a film made, the Swallows and Amazons film

RO - thats right, yeah

JA - and in that there was a charcoal scene and through this film and one thing and another they got to, the people of the film go to know that me dad had this, could do this charcoal, so they came to visit, came up and talked to him and er, he actually, they used the cabin that he had made in the film. He made a mock charcoal pit it was just hollow it was just the bed wood over and gas on it and what have you. And for the actual filming of it me dad was inside that hollow thing with a smoke stick

RO - oh no, really

JA - so the smoke was coming out, so's they could rush out and put some bits onto it, to do that and we met, we did meet all the people in the film cos I was, at that time I was at Salford University so it was during the summer when they were doing it and I came back.

RO - So that was the Swallows and Amazons one.

JA - The first Swallows and Amazons, yeah

RO - OK

JA - cos theres one just been made recently

RO - well yes

JA - and there was one before that.

RO - So , I mean, I have brought some notes from Brian who has researched it and he would reckon there was one in the summer of 1972.

JA - that was the first

RO - David Jones did the photos, is that right?

JA - No, that was the one that Bill Norris was involved in

RO - Ah, right, yeah

JA - Yeah, that was it, Glass Knott, High Glass Knott.

RO - right

JA - the next one after that he got involved with the film maker Sam Hannah and Sam Hannah arranged with the Forestry Commission and they cut all the wood, prepared and stacked it and prepared it round and then me dad and his cousin Billy then stacked the wood into the, made the charcoal pit and covered it with the reeds and the soil and what have you and did the charcoal burn that Sam Hannah, which is on that film that you have got there.

RO - yeah, yeah

JA - which actually I have a copy of it I have never actually seen it, I never actually watched it

RO - So you were saying about besoms

JA - well, we were, he finished that charcoal burn for Sam Hannah and then there was another done at Branthwaite, Brantwood in the Ruskin place, and that one wasn't filmed for any, I am not sure what the reason for it was but they did one there at Brantwood and that was done, filmed by Border Television

RO - was it? Are there copies of that anywhere do we know?

JA - I haven't, whether they have or not I have no idea but Border Television were involved in filming the one they did at Brantwood

RO - I think Arthur Barker got involved in that one did he

JA - I have no idea to be quite honest with you, by that time I wasn't living at home I was up here.

RO - Tell us your story, you didn't follow your dad into the, there wasn't much of a trade to follow into

JA - well in the 50's you could see, it started, the whole industrial wood business started to die and it was getting more and more difficult to actually make a living. And by, say by the early 60's there was only me dad and his brother working, all the others had been laid off and it got more and more difficult in the early/ late 60's the crate wood finished because they started instead of using wood to make crates for pots for export they started using plastic covered steel crates and so that disappeared. The ship fenders finished in the late, late 60's, that was another one gone. Swill wood, basically there was very few swillers left by that time and so basically the swill wood had gone. Stott Park was the last bobbin mill, that closed, bobbin wood gone. So there was very, very little left, there was still bark and rustic, there was still a bit of rustic going and bark was going but the Northallerton tannery had closed and it were now having to go down to I think it was Devon or Cornwall or somewhere down there. We were still sending significant amounts quite a few tons per year would go down but again there wasn't a lot and there were still little things like the fishing states for the Flookburgh and Baycliff fishermen. There was still besoms, they were still making besoms and sweeping besoms they were making quite number of dozens of those, a lot of them went down in Kent, County Council were buying them, they used to go by British Road Services used to come and pick them up. And also it would be still, it must have been in the late 60's, the little besom business where we were making little besoms for the Ravenscraig rolling mills. Just bundles of birch twigs only small, just small bundles you made dozens, tied them up into dozens just had one string round them, and then you chopped them off and you made them into, they were about that long (gestures)

RO - about a foot or 14 inches?

JA - 18 inches I would say and they went to Haverthwaite station initially, loaded into a railway wagon at Haverthwaite station. There would be hundreds, 7/8 hundred dozen or something like that would go at a time in a railway wagon up to Ravenscraig. Where they were used to sweep, they used to burn, put them onto the plate, rolling hot mill plate as it came off the rolling mills to remove the scale and give the tannin in the birch, gave the steel the blue colour.

RO - Can you remember the prices or anything?

JA - No, no, no that one, you see, the order for that, me dad didn't have the order for that, I am trying to think who did, there was a feller from Bouth who had the order for that, but he used, because there was so many wanted, he used to farm it out to

RO - so it was quite co-operative really?

JA - Oh yeah yeah there would be a number of people supplying into that business.

RO - what were the other names then of people you remember?

JA - Baines, Barkers, Hoggarths obviously, there wasn't all that many other than that as I remember. there were other cutters about but not in that area, really.

RO - there was someone remembered Conrad, the?

JA - Conrad, I remember Conrad. Conrad was the POW.

RO - right, was he?

JA - yeah he was a paratroop, German paratrooper and he was POW and he were released after the war and he used to live, well I am not sure where he actually lived, he worked in the woods up and we used to see him cos he used to come past, the woods he was working was near Colton school and he used to often go past, we used to often see him. He was a big chap but unfortunately he came to a sad end, did Conrad, he er, i think he, I don't know whether his family was in East Germany or where ever but he committed suicide.

RO - do you think he was lonely or?

JA - yeah, yeah, whatever and that happened while we were at Colton School, I remember that.

RO - right, it must have made an impression on a

JA - Yeah, he was, yeah, he didn't, you saw him go past, I don't think you would speak to him because we were only little kids, but he was, we knew who he was and what he was.

RO - what about the woods themselves, I mean they must have been, I mean they have all been coppiced, it was all quite an active scene. Can you, I mean, now you go there and it is sort of peace and tranquility there is hardly a leaf rustling but there must have been quite an active scene, do you remember?

JA - Well you could, obviously when we were in one wood we could hear the chainsaws going in another wood.

RO - hmm yeah.

JA - Me dad was the only one who had his own lorry, the other ones used to, most of the others would hire another firm, a lorry firm. The Burrows would quite often, used to deliver all sorts of the other peoples woods around. Eventually me dad, it became uneconomical for me dad to have the lorry and he got rid of it. Um, and so Burrows would be carting most of his stuff around if he wanted.

RO - I talked to a chap called Crowhurst, I think, who was a haulier who used to do that.

JA - Not a name I know, no thats not a name I know, I say Burrows, Spark Bridge.

RO - yeah, they were the ones

JA - Philips was still there, because we used to, well he was about the same age as me, I used to knock around with Phil all the time, yeah.

RO - but you went off to Uni?

JA - Well I passed me 11 plus went to Ulverston Grammar School in 58, September 58, I got 6 'O' Levels so I decided to stay on. I got 2 'A' Levels, didn't know what I was going to do, went down to the job centre actually and the fella down there says you don't want anything, you shouldn't be starting work you should be going to University. He said what would you like to, Oh I don't know, Civil Engineering, I think I would quite like Civil Engineering, he says 'OK' and he got me a place at Bolton Tech doing Civil Engineering.

RO - Right

JA - and I stopped with my, with me dads cousin, Billy, cos he lived at Hayward which is not far from Bolton, the train, I used to catch the train from Hayward every morning to get to Bolton and I managed the course alright but after the first, I failed 'A' Level maths so I was taking 'A' Level maths again at night school while I was at Bolton. But it just wasn't, it just wasn't for me I couldn't do 'A' Level maths. And so after 12 months there I passed all their internal examinations but I failed 'A' Level maths and I needed that at the end of the system to get the certificate and I thought well its never going to happen so I packed it in came home, went down to the job centre again and walked into a job at Glaxo, in the labs, worked in the quality control function there. That would be 60, summer 66 and I was there, I went to Lancaster, Torrisholme Technical College, day release and did ONCHNC Chemistry. It was easier, I found Chemistry was easier to me, it was no problem. And then after I had done me HNC, the next one was Royal Institute of Chemistry Part 1 that was a 2 year part-time course or 1 year full-time course followed by Part 2 which was one year part-time and a one-year full-time. And one of the other lads out of the thing, been to Grammar School in the same year as me, he went to Salford University and got his Part 2 RIC at Salford so I thought oh well, this is getting a little bit boring what I am doing here? I'll, so I didn't ask for er, they would have spon, Glaxo would have sponsored me but I didn't bother I just left and went to Salford University and was there for 2 years and every year at holidays I used to just turn up at the gates at Glaxo and walk back into me old job

RO/JA - laughter

JA - and then when I finished there in June 73, yeah June 73 again I had the possibility of 3 jobs. Glaxo offered me a job, I applied for and eventually about August I found I had got a job at Marchon and also applied for and got a job in the Zambian copper mines and they were forever pestering the Glaxo people 'is he gonna to take this job up?' I couldn't make up me mind cos I had been, we had been, me and the wife had been courting since 67 so we had been going

together for quite a while. I thought if I go out there I can either, have to get married now or it seemed a bit messy so anyway so I never really bothered about the Zambian job

RO - did you ever go at all?

JA - No, no and um, I had been for the interview that was all, that was just in London

RO - yes.

JA - And then I got this, Glaxo offered me a job and then i got the job offer from Marchon and the salary difference was significant. Glaxo I think were offering me £1200 a year and Marchon were offering me £2000.

RO - That would make quite a difference

JA - So I took up the Marchon job as a research chemist in detergents and toiletries or production of

RO - so you stayed there?

JA - I stayed, I was there right through, I got me name on a patent, a co patent and it was really good up there, really enjoyed working there. And after just working me way through, research chemist, and then eventually group leader on the, working in a particular area there and then became production manager on the Fatty Alco plant and then 2 years after that I became Production Manager over all the Surfactant business and basically it was that until the thing finished, well I finished in January 2004 I was 57, I think and the thing was finishing and I got a reasonable redundancy package so I thought I would pack up and retired

RO - Early retirement, very nice. You didn't get tempted to move back to the valley?

JA - No, no, I built this place. Got married in July 75 and then I bought this plot of land in 84 and I started building May 85 and we moved in December 86. I built this, the only thing I didn't do, I didn't put the roof on top I didn't plaster the walls and I didn't dash outside.

RO - so you can feel its your own, definitely

JA - Yeah, yeah so no, no we had no desire to move back down there at all really

RO - No, no

JA - Quite settled up here.

RO - and is there any family now

JA - 2, we have 2 daughters and we've got 2 grandchildren now. We've one, the eldest daughter lives a couple miles over there in Cleator Moor and she has a son, Lewis, who's 12 and I think on Friday he's just had his first year at West Lakes. And then 22nd May, the other daughter, who lives in Newcastle now, gave birth to me grand daughter, Matilda who's 8 weeks old. So we have been spending quite a few, we have been over there once a week for the last few weeks

RO - Going back a bit, did you do any sort of family tree, did you look into it?

JA - I have started a family tree and I have, but its only, its a very narrow one although there are a lot of people doing family tress of which we are part of, think mine only has about 300 people on. And yes, I have gone back on me dads side to about 1760 and as I say every one of the direct line has been, were woodcutters up till then.

RO - Right, right.

JA - the Allonbys were mainly associated with Hawkshead in that, in that whole of that valley, I am trying to think if theres a name but I cant remember it at the moment but they were all lived there they spread out a bit but not much and they did there was one of them was they sort of moved up and moved back down again. They were living at Millom at one time and then there was another lot moved up to just below Muncaster Castle there they were cutting woods there but mainly moved back down again. And I did a bit on me Grand mothers Allonby side as well and they were, they were the gravestones, Gradwell's, Penny's, Machell's all sorts of er

RO - Local names?

JA - Yeah, who is it has the Kendal Castle? Sizergh Castle? I know its National Trust but I forget, but anyway theres one of the some connection in there as well, I am not quite sure what it was but, I haven't really delved into that one but some of them went out to South Africa, I think theres still family out there somewhere.

RO - And er, so one of the sort of questions that comes up is this whole thing about the bark peelers and the charcoal burners being separate, somehow, although their huts were different, have you got anything tho say about that, do you know what I mean

JA - yeah, well in a sense you see, bark peeling, they would want to be there early and work late, and so it would be it was a summer, bark peeling is a summer

RO - summer thing?

JA - summer thing and therefore they are not expecting all that much rain so it was a temporary sort of shelter they would put up

RO - Tent?

JA - I suspect it wouldn't have any facilities wouldn't the fire or anything like that it would be just they wouldn't need it. Whereas the charcoal burners is back end burning and you got, you got wind, rain and what have you. So they would have a more, and also they had to be, it was slightly bigger because they were, they had to be there 24 hours during the night.

RO - Yes

JA - Looking at it, watching it as well.

RO - Yes, so when you say back end, so it would have started in August? Do you think?

JA - well they would still be peeling in August

RO - Peeling in August, yeah

JA - Early August they would finish peeling

RO - right, it would really be when that finished

JA - Yeah, after that

RO - they would start thinking about it.

JA - they would start moving into the charcoal. You see there was two types of wood. There was a winter wood and a summer wood. Your summer wood was your oak, but your winter woods and all the other, bobbin wood, birch, elder, hazel and things of that nature. And after, Me dad has a little, I got a little notebook with some things he has written down there actually and he was saying that after the 5th of April you weren't allowed to cut any

RO - your winter wood

JA - your winter wood, your birch and elder you weren't allowed to cut that .

RO - just oak form there on?

JA - basically, yeah and the bark was worth more than the wood and in actual fact thats all, all the the wood in those days, there was no rustic bit, the bulk would go for swill wood and there would be a lot of swill wood gone

RO - yep

JA - but that was only the 5 or 6 foot up the tree maybe a bit more.

RO - sure

JA - the rest of it ,they wanted the bark so they would peel it all and all that would go into the charcoal

RO - right, yeah

JA - so there would be a lot of peeled oak in the charcoal. but it would be seasoned and the birch would have been cut and if it hadn't gone for bobbin wood it would be there cut and stacked ready for the charcoal burn as well. In the 60's you knew there was nothing there it was a, it became a hobby business basically, and basically thats what it is now, it got people, not say playing about, it er its not a business anymore, there isn't any, theres no financial thing in it

RO - well you say that but i did make a fairly good living for 20 years, just doing coppicing, charcoal and firewood

JA - Yeah, well firewood is suddenly become a big thing here

RO - firewood is big these days

JA - yeah, because of the wood burners

RO - um

JA - I wouldn't have one thrown at me, there just, I just remember it was too much like hard bloody work keeping the fire going

RO - Yeah

JA - but things are a bit better than the but er, yeah theres a lot of firewood. Because there, towards, I was always amazed that nobody really has come up with a decent use for the coppice wood, the birch, the elder, the oak or whatever. There is no significant value in it anymore and I always surprised that nobody has actually developed something along that line. I know in the late/early 70's me dad was cutting it into 8/6/7 foot lengths and it was going, I think it was going to North Wales into one of these er I don't know whether it was a chipboard manufacturer or something like that

RO - right, um

JA - and there was a place in North Wales, I think the Hexham plant did take some stuff as well.

RO - yeah, yeah.

JA - but its never really

RO - chips never going make, maybe a high value thing though is it?

JA - No

RO - I mean, I used to make hurdles, but that wasn't necessarily very traditional for this area

JA - No , no that was not something that was er, hazel hurdles and the likes, that was not a thing, me dad made hurdles but it was only for the

RO - they were farm use weren't they?

JA - well they weren't, they, round here they weren't used, they didn't use them round here .

RO - what did your dad make them for then?

JA - well they only used them for the charcoal burner.

RO - right, to make just screening, yeah

JA - screening that was all, but he never, he were never into hurdles in any shape or form.

RO - no.

JA - um, yeah, there was a lot of gardening type stuff come in from that point of view and yeah we used to make pea sticks well like they disappeared cos nobody grows peas 6 foot tall any more they are all 18 inches above ground, they don't need sticks any more.

RO - They, they, we sell a lot to big gardens they stake up herbacious with them now so it looks better.

JA - Yeah, yeah, but there was also bean poles and stuff like that but there were, it was minor sort of stuff

RO - um.

JA - it wasn't um

Ro - Not the mass markets that you used to sell, yeah

JA - No nothing significant really in them businesses. Yeah we did a lot of pea sticks at times, a few bean sticks but not a lot. Fishing stakes, yeah, we did a lot of them you used to bundle them up in scores, thats a number that probably a lot of people wouldn't know what you were up to

RO - Well, 20 odd, yes.

JA - 20 yeah, 20.

RO - Is there anything else that we have missed that you would like to tell us? or?

JA - there probably is but - laughter

RO - Laughter, well, I think we've got a good long interview there, thats really kind of you, very interesting.

JA - I say the only other thing is um, say we were born at Spark Bridge and we had the choice of 3 primary schools to go to. There was Penny Bridge, Lowick and Colton. Penny Bridge there was a bus to, Lowick there was a bus to, Colton there was no bus. We went to Colton. Laughter. Well me dad had gone to Colton School.

RO - Oh, you do resent this still?

JA - No, I actually, no I don't at all. I er, in fact Colton School was absolutely superb

RO - was it?

JA - and we used to walk, me mam walked with me for a few weeks, I was five, me mam walked with me for a few weeks and then after that I just went on me own. And within a short period of time me brother joined me so there was 2 of us and we walked to Colton School and back.

RO - How far was that?

JA - It was about 2 miles

RO - Yeah, yeah.

JA - It was about 2 miles. It was just cart track basically in them days. Its now a road and there was a little bit of road at the end about 3 or 4 hundred yards and then back into fields and up to school.

RO - right

JA - School was superb. There was one, there was just, mainly one teacher, Occasionally there was another one. Main teacher was Miss Snape and she came from a village near, down Southport way called Crank. And, I think the most I can ever remember at school would be about 20 and the least would be about 9. We always used to do reasonably well at 11+ there was nearly always somebody who passed their 11+ from that school every year. Zelda, what was her other hame? Zelda, Barbara Bell, William Watson, Margaret Watson. These were all people gone before, they had gone to the grammar school before me. Almost every year

RO - ok

JA - there was someone from Colton School there

RO - yeah

JA - I was there, and there was 2 of us passed the year I went. There was me and a lad called Les Robinson, passed.

RO - did you do it with coaching, were you coached?

JA - I have no doubt we were, although, I am not sure whether we were, no I don't think you could be coached cos I had never sat an exam before. I had to go down to Ulverston Victoria School to sit the exam. I had never been in a spot, at a desk and a chair, and hundreds of these things around and all these kids sitting at these , the same. Laughter.

JA - And it was almost like, I don't know, IQ test, a peculiar thing anyway. The other thing was you had to write an essay and that was done at the, back at the school, after you had sat the exam, and you came back to school and you had an essay to write, and it had to be a full, I think it was a fullscap, a fullscap piece, I think it was maybe a 100 words or something, anyway, just a foolscap sheet and I was never any good at essays at all I couldn't, I couldn't do them, urm, because I never, I still can't, I never embellished anything, you know if I, 'what did you do during school?' I did this that and the other but nothing in between (Laughter) but you didn't know what the title would be but you knew you would have choice of titles and you also knew that nearly always one of those choices would end up with, could be adventure type thing or something what about writing one on Alcock and Browns flight across the Atlantic

RO - right

JA - cos it was in me dads time sort of thing ok so we can adjust the title to accommodate that so he wrote me an essay at home and basically I memorised it

RO - right (Laughter)

JA - and, and so that was my

RO - thats how you got in?

JA - thats what I did, yeah. I think there was 128, 128, something like that passed the 11+ that year. There was 4 classes, 4 classes of 32 and I think

RO - at Ulverston?

JA - At Ulverston that year, that was the first time they had had 4 lots, and er, I think I was initially 102 or something like that at the end after the, after the first years examination,

RO - right

JA - I came out 102, and I ended up in, er, there was ABC, I am not sure D or what it was but there was, I ended up in C grade, C class. Les ended up in the next one down, D or whatever it was, I cant remember, might have been D and basically I would be, I was top, whenever we did exams top chemistry, physics, maths, biology I was top, and bottom in French, English anything of that nature

RO - laughter

JA - and anything of that nature I was bottom

RO - you had your bits you were good at

JA - Ooh, and eventually I worked I eventually did get to top of the class, round about 5th form I did get to top of class I did get class prize, I still have it

RO/JA - laughter

JA - its just a book, physics book i think, but I had to work at everything I did but I could, I could remember things basically and physics, the maths, the science side was easy so

RO - tell me, remind which year did your father die?

JA - me dad died in December 84

RO - oh right

JA - so he never actually he never saw this

RO - did he get to retire?

JA - oh yes, he retired at er, yeah um, he retired at 65

RO - yep

JA - he was 72 when he died

RO - right

JA - yes, so he did, and when he retired things were a lot easier, things had got very hard for him at um you know the last 63.64.65 years he was very tired, it was very difficult

RO - it was quite hard?

JA - but when he retired he was alright, he was happy

RO - your mum didn't work?

JA - no, no me mum never worked, she would do odd jobs, she did clean, she did church cleaning. I think she did clean for one or two people, houses. Cos I remember, she did clean for the author, um, he's just moved down back down London, Hunter Davis.

RO - oh right

JA - Cos he lived for a short while at Oxen Park, rented accommodation at Oxen Park, next to me Great Aunty Florrie and er she cleaned his house for him while he was there. She would walk up there clean it and walk back

RO - very good

JA - no, never worked. She was, I think during the war she was a dairy maid.

RO - laughter

JA - not on the farm, she was down in the er, down Lancashire, down near Fylde, somewhere down there.

RO - right

JA - The whole family, everyone in the family

Mrs A - except you

JA - everyone in the family cousin Billy, all of them

Mrs A - and he doesn't know a waltz from a quickstep (Laughter)

JA - me cousin, all of them played violin, uncle Norman could play, cousin Billy could play, virtually all of them could play a musical instrument and it just, and cousin Billy used to play in dance bands around the town

RO - what about your brother?

JA - No, no

RO - skipped your generation altogether -

JA - Nothing at all, and the next one as well, cos we tried to get our two but not,

Mrs A - they are not interested (laughter)

JA - well they just couldn't either, just couldn't, no no

RO- funny isn't it

JD- but its incredible that you made violins

JA - yeah, yeah

RO - you like dancing? you like dancing

Mrs A - we do modern sequence, try to (laughter)

RO - great

JD - what was the hardest thing about living and working in the woods and charcoal burning, do you think?

JA - I didn't think it was hard I used to enjoy it,

RO - Fun?

JA I used to work as I say with me dad, I used to enjoy it

JD - whatever the weather?

JA - yeah, I remember, (laughter) I remember one day he was working, it was Rusland Heights we were at, there was something wrong with the car, I can't, me dad had an accident or somebody run into him, anyway we had no car and so we walked to Rusland Heights from Spark Bridge and, to go to work, and it absolutely chucked it down and we and we had to walk back and it was absolutely heaving and it was September, just before Rusland Show, the Friday before Rusland Show, because we just had a sack round our shoulders we just looked like two tramps.

(Laughter), I was not, I was not all that old I suppose, 12, 13 maybe 14 and we walked back all the way and we were absolutely soaked when we got back. If it was raining you didn't go if it was raining, you know, you wouldn't go up to the wood if it was raining, but you would work if it, when you got there and it started to rain.

JD - so do you miss that part of life?

JA - I did, oh yeah, if it had been a commercial possibility I wouldn't have been a Chemist.

RO - Really, do you think that, you'd have gone for it

JA - yeah

RO - yeah,yeah

Mrs Allonby - Oh he would have loved it

RO - Brillaint, well I think we will wrap it up there, thats lovely.